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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRASILIA 001164

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [KCRM](#) [BR](#)

SUBJECT: AGRARIAN TENSIONS REMAIN HIGH IN BRAZIL'S PARA STATE

REF: A. BRASILIA 821

[1](#)B. BRASILIA 464

Classified By: POLOFF BISOLA OJIKUTU, FOR REASONS 1.4B AND D.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Tensions between small farmers, large landowners and government authorities continue to run high in the Brazilian state of Para, two months after the murder of US citizen nun Dorothy Stang. Five suspects are in custody for Stang's killing. The Brazilian Agriculture Minister relayed concerns to the Ambassador over the growing security concerns in Para. The Chief Justice of the Para state Court of Justice does not foresee any delays in the Stang murder trial. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) In an April 25 meeting with Ambassador Danilovich, Brazilian Agriculture Minister Roberto Rodrigues said that he and President Lula da Silva would travel to the area because of growing concerns about the security situation there. Minister Rodrigues told the Ambassador that they (presumably large landowners) "are getting ready to kill again". Rodrigues added that he is aware that there are four US citizen nuns still in the area. However, when Lula traveled to the area on April 27, he merely inaugurated a biodeisel project but did not address public security issues at all.

[1](#)3. (U) Brazil's Para state, at the mouth of the Amazon River, was the site of the February murder of US citizen nun Dorothy Stang (refs). Five suspects are now in custody for that killing, including two landowners, one middleman, and two alleged gunmen. Stang was long involved in activities on behalf of the landless and small farmers that drew the ire of large landowners, ranchers, and loggers in the region. Despite the presence of military troops, deployed to support the Federal Police in the wake of the Stang murder, the situation in Para's rural areas remains unsettled.

[1](#)4. (C) Jose Sales, Superintendent of the Federal Police in Para, told Consular Agent this week that the Stang murder has been concluded with the five arrested suspects (two gunmen, two middlemen, and two landowners who masterminded the conspiracy). The Federal Police are no longer looking to expand the investigation to a possibly broader conspiracy of landowners.

[1](#)5. (U) Recently, there has been a concerted effort in some Para media outlets to impugn Sister Dorothy Stang. A magazine called "Hoje" ("Today") published last week in the interior town of Altamira (near to where Stang was gunned down) ran stinging criticisms of the nun, and local left-of-center Workers' Party officials. Federal Police supervisor Sales also told us that a number of clandestine radio stations in the area are running similar stories. Federal Prosecutor Felicio Pontes has asked Sales to close down the pirate radio stations, but Sales faces bureaucratic hurdles before he can do so.

[1](#)6. (C) Sales also shared with us his personal view that Stang had gone too far: she once approached Sales and asked him to "remove the land poachers at all costs". To Sales' reply that it would have to be done through legal means, she responded she would do it "her own way". Sales recognizes that Stang's high-profile public image gave courage to the landless and environmental activists, yet he doubts that other religious figures will be willing to follow her tactics.

[1](#)7. (C) Sales estimates that only about 50% of the 1,800 Army troops assigned to support the GoB's peacekeeping efforts in Para are still there --spread over an enormous and remote area. The military deployment, he says, was very costly, particularly with the use of helicopters and with little support in terms of lodging and logistics.

[1](#)8. (C) Sales also commented on the role of Milton Nobre, Chief Justice of the State Court of Justice. (Sales himself opposes the idea of "federalization", i.e., letting the federal courts take over the Stang murder trial.) Milton Nobre has just recently been elected Chief Justice of the court by his peers. He is dynamic, he knows what he is doing and is correcting mistakes of the past, according to Sales. Nobre's ambition is to be a federal high court justice, so he is eager to make his mark. Sales says that he knows no federal judge who would perform as well as Nobre.

9. (C) Separately, Judge Nobre assured us that there will be no undue delays in the Stang murder trial and guarantees that this case will be prosecuted in record time. He said that, within 40 days, it will be presented before a jury. The case can be appealed within 30 days, he said. Regarding federalization, Nobre points out that there are only nine federal judges in Para state, versus 244 state judges hence the state courts have a stronger structure for a complicated case. Nobre adds that the state courts have prosecuted major human rights cases in Para in the past (e.g., Canuto, Fontelles, Joo Batista, El Dourado dos Carajas), although he signally did not comment on the quality of justice administered in those cases.

10. (U) In late March, EmbOfs met with Justice Arnaldo Esteves, the Brazilian Supreme Court (STJ) judge in charge of federalizing Stang's murder case. Esteves invited the four defendants to file motions to federalize the case and expected to receive them soon. The STJ recently told us that the motions have not yet been filed because the prosecution is still gathering evidence. After the motions are filed, the STJ will schedule a hearing to hear oral arguments and issue a decision. Theoretically, if the STJ decides to federalize the case, Para state authorities and the defendants could appeal. Judge Esteves noted that there are no written rules or criteria for this process, and has never been done before, hence he is "inventing" the process as he goes. If the case is federalized, it would be heard by a federal judge and a popular jury in Para. Whether the trial is ultimately handled by a state or federal court, he guessed that the actual murder trial would begin no earlier than July 2005.

COMMENT -- FOUR NUNS NOT IN IMMEDIATE DANGER

11. (C) The US Consular Agent in Belem, the capital of Para state, has alerted the Belem-based "Sisters of Notre Dame", Dorothy Stang's order, about our concerns about high tensions in the area. One of the Notre Dame nuns responded that they have not suffered death threats and are not unduly concerned for their safety. The nun noted that there are only four US citizen nuns in the area, and while one is a bit of an activist, none have anything like the public profile of Dorothy Stang. Meanwhile, Sister Stang's work has been taken on by a Brazilian novice to the order in the town of Anapu (where Stang was killed). The sisters report that the novice is recommitted to the work in the wake of Stang's death. Post will also review Consular Information Sheet with an eye to including language on rural Para.

DANILOVICH